1:Gallin E-4,5 (1957-1958) 1966
AD5 Taiwan Hokkien AD5

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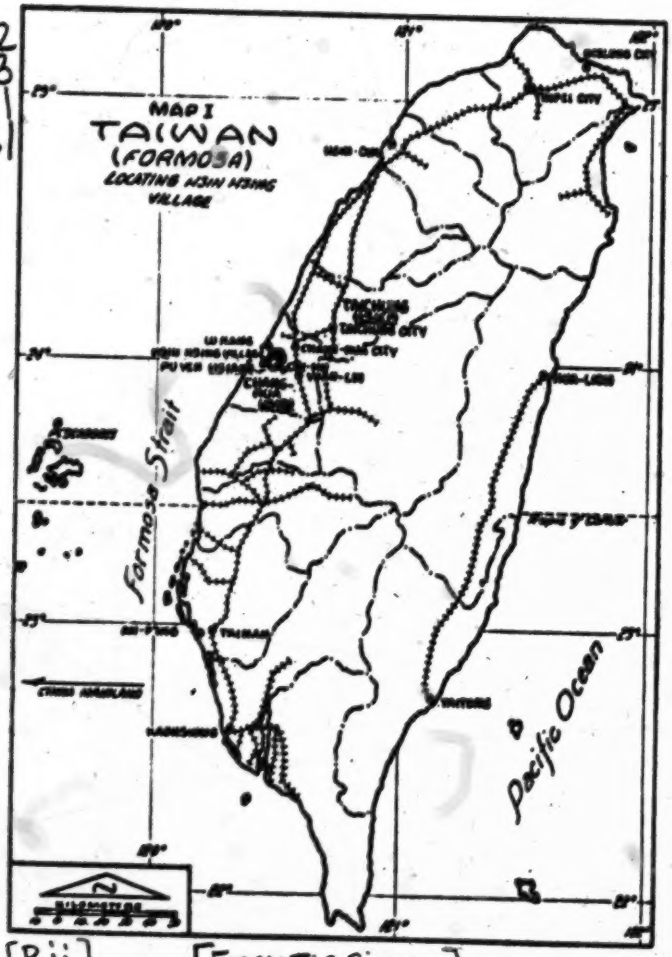

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1:Gallin E-4,5 (1957-1958) 1966
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Formosa AD1

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The Setting

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In any community study there is always the question of where to begin outlining the picture of village life; on what does one focus first? While the question is perhaps just as urgent during the actual fieldwork, in the field it is possible to observe and ask questions on many subjects at the same time and to move from one subject to another in the course of an interview. But in attempting to put the ethnography down on paper, the decision must be made where to begin.

I have chosen to begin this book as I began my fieldwork—with a general picture of village life that will provide a context which can give meaning to particular aspects of village life. This picture will be followed in Chapters 3 and 4 by a description of the village livelihood, although it has perhaps been more common to begin Chinese ethnographies with a discussion of family and kinship (here Chapters 5 and 6). The importance of the economic sphere in Hsin Hsing is explicit in the very purposes of this book as noted in Chapter 1 and the conclusions of Chapter 9; its importance was implicit throughout the fieldwork as it will be throughout this book. We now turn then to the setting of the village so that specific topical chapters which follow will have some contextual meaning.

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Travel to Hsin Hsing village from the capital city, Taipei, is neither easy nor brief. The approximately one hundred and seventeen-mile trip to Chang-hua, the closest major city, must be made mostly by train via the seacoast or by the interior route through Taichung City. This takes about three hours by diesel express or six hours or more by a local train. It is generally possible to find a seat on the diesel express, but on the local trains one must almost always stand a good part of the way.

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Once out of Taipei the countryside is almost all rice paddies and farmland. Even in the mountain area between Taipei and Taichung, terraced rice paddies form a part of the green and lush vegetation typical of Taiwan. The train goes through a series of tunnels in these rugged mountains, and if one happens to be traveling with a Taiwanese companion, he will probably point out that these tunnels, like the railroad lines, were all built during the Japanese occupation.

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3:Wolf F-5 (1959-1961) 1968 AD5 Taiwan Hokkien
Taiwan AD6

The City and the Market Town

In the few arcades streets closed to automobiles in the United States and England, one is conscious of the sound of feet on concrete, but in Taipei, even though the wooden clogs of the poor make much more noise than Western leather, one is conscious of voices. Children cry, women gossip, storekeepers greet friends and customers, peddlers inform passers-by of the quality and freshness of their wares, pedi-cab drivers shout warnings to pedestrians about to step in front of them, neighbors discuss the bargains they've found, and not infrequently family quarrels are presented for the world to judge. Winter or summer, day or night, there is always the smell of smoke—coal smoke, charcoal smoke, fuel oil. Often it is delicately embroidered with a thread of incense coming from a family altar in the back of a store or from a small temple tucked down a side alley. The air is heavy with smells, not just smoke, but the oily smells of cooking, the salty smell of drying fish, the sharp tang of pickled vegetables, the elegant smell of sandalwood being fashioned into boxes and furnishings for the rich, and always somewhere in every neighborhood the smell of the "honey-wagon," a slow moving tank cart that goes from house to house to collect "night-soil."

In 1957 my husband and I arrived in Taipei and spent the better part of a year there, studying Mandarin. The following year, the majority of which I was forced to spend in the United States because of the illnesses of my parents, my husband searched the island for a suitable village in which to carry out the anthropological field project that had brought him to Taiwan. I returned not to the noisy, jostling city but to a small, quiet village on the banks of the Tamsui River. In its way of life, Peihotien was far from Taipei; in miles, the distance was not great. With luck and a feeling of urgency, the trip from the Taipei train station to our doorstep could be made in an hour, half by train and half by foot. The train rumbled through Taipei suburbs, a small city, a couple of small market towns, and much open paddy land before it dropped us in the market town of Tapu. Tapu is the buying, selling, repairing, and general servicing town for a number of villages, including the one in which I was to live.

The Tapu train station opens onto a little square; the square in turn opens onto the main street of the town. I have never seen the square completely empty, not even in the heavy rains that break the heat of summer afternoons. There is a man who sells hot noodles from a little cart, another with fresh fruit, another with newspapers and gaudy magazines.

CHAPTER II

THE SETTING

Location and Physiography

131 The island of Taiwan (or Formosa) lies on an arc which is convex to the Asiatic mainland and is bisected by the Tropic of Cancer. At its closest point, Taiwan is 90 miles from the province of Fukien on the Chinese mainland and nearly equidistant between Shanghai and Hong Kong, each 400 miles distant (Cressey, 1964:174). Six hundred miles up the arc to the northeast through Okinawa is the Japanese island of Kyushu. Down the arc in the other direction is Luzon in the Philippines a distance of only 200 miles (Cressey, 1955:234). Taiwan is shaped roughly like a tobacco leaf, about 245 miles long and 90 miles wide at its widest point. Its coastline of 700 miles is exceptionally smooth and unindented (Tregear, 1965:304). With a total area of 13,800 square miles, it is about the size of Holland or Massachusetts (See Figure 1).

133 The island, for the most part, is very mountainous. There are thirty peaks exceeding 10,000 feet in elevation

[TEXT CONTINUED ON PAGE 42]

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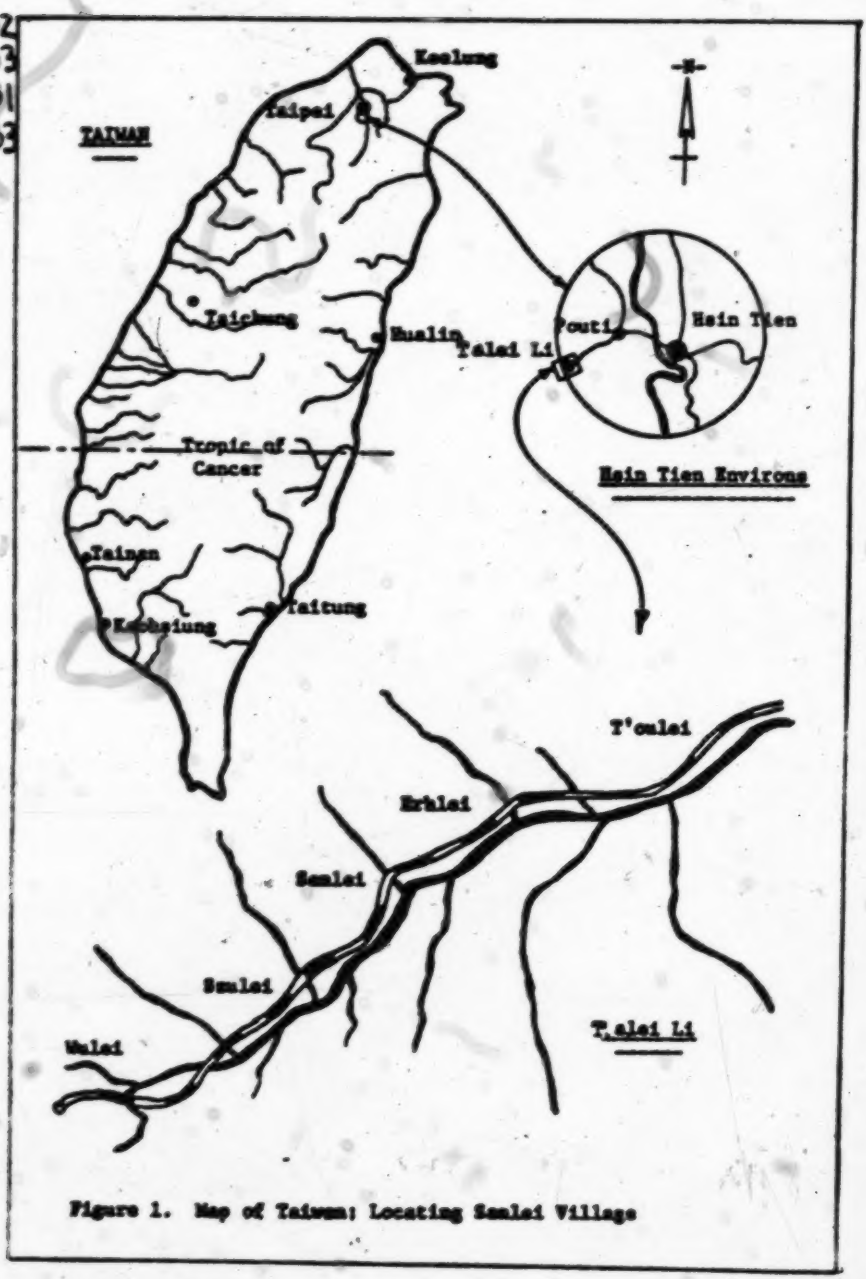

Figure 1. Map of Taiwan: Locating Sanlei Village

and land which is relatively flat totals only about fif-
teen per cent of the island (Cressey, 1964:177). The soils are similar to those of south China, mature, leached, acid, and in need of constant applications of lime and fertilizer (Tregear, 1965:306). Because of the terrain, scarcely more than one third of the land area is arable. The mountains are forested with some minerals, chiefly coal, found in the northern end of the island (Hsieh, 1964:109).

The village of Sanlei lies in the northern third of Taiwan, about four miles south of Taipei, Taiwan's capital and largest city with a 1965 population exceeding one and a quarter million people. To travel to the village, one first takes a highway bus to Hsin Tien, a town of over 10,000 people, 2-1/2 miles south of Taipei (See Figure 1). The township office with hegemony over Sanlei is located in Hsin Tien and the town has traditionally served as the major market and political center for the nearby villages. Because of the mountainous terrain, the extent of the area is irregular but probably does not exceed a radius of two miles at a maximum. In the direction of Taipei, its influence extends less than half the distance between town and city. Hsin Tien is also a famous tourist mecca, located next to Green Lake where boats may be rented. Prior to the construction of a modern four-lane highway in 1959, there was also a train from Taipei to Hsin Tien.